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(To Be Continued.)

SOME INNER HISTORY OF THE VIRGINIA COMPANY.¹

Communicated by N. W. STEPHENSON, of the College of
Charleston, S. C.

The closer one observes the fragmentary records of the Virginia Company, the more one is convinced that in its affairs there were wheels within wheels both commercial and political. Among these was one hitherto ignored which may yet prove the main spring of much of the Company's politics subsequent to 1617. This was a syndicate of capitalists that controlled during several years the Company's monopoly of Virginia trade. The consideration aroused by them in the past has been scant indeed. Professor Osgood who refers to them by the extensive title of Society of Particular Adventurers for Traffic with the People of Virginia in Joint Stock¹ dismisses them with a page and a half. Miss Kingsburg, in that introduction to the Virginia Records² which crowns adequately her splendid toil, gives them but a few

¹ *The American Colonies in the Seventeenth Century*, I, 88. In the Court Book of the Company they are spoken of as particular adventurers of the magazine. Kingsbury, *Records of the Virginia Company*, I, 233. Professor Osgood mentions their officers, "a director and five councilors," and adds that their "accounts were passed upon by the Auditors of the company." But unless I have misunderstood the entry in the court book, June 9, 1619, there had been no auditing previous to that time, and the auditing which then took place was forced upon the syndicate by its enemies.

² *Records of the Virginia Company*, I, 94 (Introduction): "The Courtbook is the only source of information with regard to the old Magazine"

lines, and is of the opinion that all we know of them lies embedded in the Company's court book. Alexander Brown, ordinarily so observant, appears to have missed their significance altogether, mentioning in his *First Republic* neither their organization nor their dissolution. Nevertheless, I venture to think that there is considerable evidence, some direct, some indirect, much circumstantial, for considering these Particular Adventurers as of prime importance in the history of the Company.

I beg leave to speak of them by a modern term. Let us call them the Smythe syndicate.³ The appropriateness of the term will become apparent as we proceed. That they belonged to the party of Sir Thomas Smythe, that they were assailed and at length put out of business by his avowed enemies, that their downfall was directly connected with the triumph of the party of Sir Edwin Sandys, is all established by the court book. The questions which the records do not answer are—why was the Smythe syndicate formed? what, if any, were the effects of its dissolution? To reply to these questions we must consider the Virginia Company not in isolation but as part of the general tangle of the business interests of its day.

To begin with, the fundamentally business character of the first stage of Virginia history need not be emphasized. No one, to-day, will question the statement that Sir Thomas Smythe, during nearly ten years of the Virginia Company, was its directing spirit. And if ever there was an out-and-out plutocrat, in our modern sense, it was Sir Thomas. With a finger in nearly every bold venture of his time, he literally ranged the world in search of dividends. The image of him who goes up and down seeking whom he may devour inevitably comes to mind. We are not surprised that Virginia under Sir Thomas' rule resembled a penal settlement rather than a colony, justifying the modern account of the earliest Virginia as a "plantation system . . . with

³ See the court book, June 24, 1619. "A controversy arising amongst the Adventurers of the Magazine for their place of meeting, it being made known that Mr. Alderman Johnson who is the Director thereof, desired it might be at Sir Thomas Smith's, by reason he was one of the greatest and principal Adventurers"

great rigor, the colonists working in gangs under officials as overseers, eating at common tables, and living in common barracks.”⁴ It was only natural that the Company maintained an absolute monopoly both of land and trade as long as Sir Thomas ruled it.

The history of the Virginia Company includes several questions of political alignment—or, if you will, factional alignment—which historians in the main have accepted as mere fact, scarce important enough to detain them, and which still await their complete explanation. The first of these is the virtual surrender by Smythe and his faction of the colonizing and governing functions of the Company. Sir Edwin Sandys, the very antithesis of Smythe, was made “assistant” to the Treasurer, and apparently given a free hand in the matter of colonizing and governing. Writing of the re-election of Smythe as Treasurer, in May, 1617, Alexander Brown says, “Sir Edwin Sandys was probably chosen his assistant at this time.”⁵ As every student knows, the character of the legislation for Virginia at once changed. The penal settlement disappeared; the land monopoly was broken up; the views of the English Liberals found their practical expression in the organization of the House of Burgesses. But is it not strange that such relentless monopolists as Smythe and his lieutenant, Mr. Alderman Johnson, should have consented to this transformation of their Company’s policy? Knowing what they stood for in the general business of their day, must we not conclude that, somehow, they saw in this change a business opportunity for themselves? Assuredly. And when we reflect upon the situation, as it was in 1617, the explanation is not so far to seek after all. For now ten years they had sunk money lavishly in Virginia without return. Smythe, who was also the chief man in the East India Company, was coining money in his Oriental investments, and losing it in his American one. Evidently he concluded, some time about the end of 1616, or the opening of 1617, that things had gone far enough. He would

⁴ Osgood, *The American Colonies*, I, 63.

⁵ *First Republic in America*, 251.

risk no more in Virginia. If others could be found to take up the burden of Virginia, well and good—even if they were political dreamers with whose ideality he had nothing in common. Perhaps, at that moment, when Smythe's experiment had ended in failure, only dreamers like Sandys and his friends would attempt to resuscitate the Virginia venture.⁶

Be that as it may, the transfer of the Company's legislative function took place. But would it be natural for Smythe, the arch monopolist, to make a clean sweep of the whole affair, and turn over, unless actually forced to do so, the control of the business of Virginia along with the control of its government? Now we come to the Particular Adventurers and their overlooked significance. Before surrendering Virginia's government, Smythe had effected an organization, separate from the general Company, which was to take over the Company's "Magazine"—sales department, the modern might say—with a director of its own, separate accounts, and even it would seem, its own secret method of business.⁷ The Director chosen was Smythe's henchman, Mr. Alderman Johnson.⁸ By this new organization—the promoters of which we may call the Smythe syndicate—the monopoly of Virginia trade was to be administered, even while Sandys was administering the government of the Colony. Smythe being still nominal head of the whole Company, his syndicate doubtless felt secure against any desire the Liberals

⁶ It should not be forgotten that Sandys and other political idealists were from 1614 to 1621 at a standstill, so far as English politics went, through the lack of party machinery that would operate when Parliament was not in session. Hence, very likely, the increase of their activity with regard to colonization in that period. The House of Burgesses and the accompanying measures, formed a political manifesto in terms of action.

⁷ Kingsbury, *Records of the Virginia Company*, I, 227.

In this connection it is but fair to point out that one of the ablest of scholars takes a different view. Professor Osgood attributes the formation of the Society of Particular Adventurers to no deeper cause than "the exhaustion of funds (of the general Company) . . . in 1616." *Colonies*, I, 88.

⁸ Kingsbury, *Records of the Virginia Company*, I, 227.

might have to dispossess them. During the next two years we may imagine Smythe and his syndicate, quietly attending to business in that obscure background not yet adequately explored and cynically disdainful of Sandys' experiment in political idealism.

These two years ended in one of those startling realignments of faction that give to the politics of the Company their kaleidoscopic character. The conspicuous history of these years, the noble constitutional achievements of Sandys, have had abundant attention.⁹ But they do not lead up to any explanation of the revolution within the Company in 1619. To make any progress toward an explanation, we must turn aside from Sandys, the statesman, and observe the career of his rival, the great plutocrat, Sir Thomas Smythe.

His activities were numerous. Besides his interest in the Virginia Company, he was a power in the Somers Islands Company, in the Muscovy Company, and was Governor of the East India Company. It is through the latter Company, curiously enough, that we get a real clue to the source of the turmoil that developed in the Virginia Company in 1619.¹⁰

⁹ Most ably re-examined by Professor Osgood in the first volume of the *American Colonies in the Seventeenth Century*. Alexander Brown's *First Republic in America* is, of course, a great monument to an enthusiastic patience. Since the publication of the *Records* by Miss Kingsbury, however, Brown appears to need thorough editing. His details are sometimes puzzling. For example, he reports a meeting of the Company on June 27. But the court book contains no record either under that date or ten days earlier. Brown's report of a meeting, July 8 should, according to his practice of altering dates, refer to that of June 28, but has little similarity to the original record. Throughout June and July, 1619, he passed over, apparently without suspecting their significance, a number of references to the Magazine.

¹⁰ Formerly it was attributed to mere squabbling. Brown, perceiving more clearly the political affiliations of the participants, doubtless went too far in making it an integral part of English politics. A more temperate view finds recent expression in Miss Kingsbury's words: "The movement begins in the years first preceding the accession of Sir Edwin Sandys to the position of treasurer, and seems to have had its origin in the trouble over Sir Samuel Argall and the appointment of Sir George Yeardley as governor of the colony." *Introduction to the Records of the Virginia Company*, 100. Still a different view is the inspiration of the present paper.

The profits of the East India Company were already enormous. A single detail establishes their greatness. We have a record of a discussion in one of the Company's courts as to what gifts should be made at Christmas to "some lords and other officers of whose countenance and favor the Company stand in need; 1000£ the most that hath formerly been given, although the general opinion for 4,000£ or 5,000£ . . . ¹¹ allowing for the difference in the value of money then and now, nothing more need be said on the wealth or the principles of a Company that went in for corruption on such a scale. We are not surprised to find that already it was doing banking in a great way, making loans to King James,¹² to the English Exchequer,¹³ to the Emperor of Russia.¹⁴

For any one to cross the plains of such a vested interest in its own East India field was to court a struggle in which mercy should not be known. Such audacity was displayed by a daring young Englishman, who perhaps was the last survival of the semi-piratical temper of the high days of Elizabeth and her rovers. During 1617 occurred an incident which was reported to the Company, in substance, thus: "these seas begin to be full of rovers; Sir Robert Rich and one Philip Barnadoe set out two ships to take pirates; they missed their entry to the Red Sea, and gave chase to the Queen Mother's junk, and had not the English fleet arrived would have taken and rifled her."¹⁵ This report received at London, January, 1618, also made it plain that the incident had caused strained relations at the court of the Great Moghul where that masterly diplomat, Sir Thomas Roe, was playing the Company's hand with consummate skill. A later report from India¹⁶ contained information calendared as follows: . . . "had the junk been taken all the Company's goods in India could not have made satisfaction according to their desire and that is

¹¹ *Calendar of State Papers, East Indies*, 1617-1621, No. 781.

¹² *Ibid.*, Nos. 514, 797.

¹³ *Ibid.*, No. 235.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, No. 319, 322, 465.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, No. 267.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, No. 193.

commonly the law in these cases. The goods taken out of the two English ships at Swaaly hath been delivered to Keridge; the ships Pring intends to employ in the Company's service. The Lord Ambassador writes that never was anything more kindly taken at Court than the rescuing of this junk; what effect it will work upon this inconstant King is yet unknown for he is able to forget a good turn very suddenly." No need to debate upon the tempest this aroused in the bosoms of the East India directors.

Sir Robert Rich, afterward Lord Rich, eventually second Earl of Warwick, still awaits his biographer.¹⁷ In historic portraiture he is a brilliant possibility. The nephew of Essex, he figured as a boy in a masque written by Ben Jonson and performed at Whitehall; as a young man surcharged with audacity, we behold him reviving the traditions of an earlier day when English privateers might singe the King of Spain's beard—still more freely that of a heathen prince—without creating scandal; later he turned Puritan and came to his end a statesman of the Commonwealth beloved by Cromwell. What part of him was honorable, what not, remains for the sympathetic biographer to determine. The prosaic vision of the mere investigator finds in Rich, as his ruling motive, a masterful addiction to the main chance.¹⁸

¹⁷ The most recent writer upon Rich is an avowed reactionary whose attitude is stated thus: "Virginia historians have a tendency to identify completely the cause of the Company with that of Parliament and have spared no adjectives in reviling the Earl of Warwick and Sir Nathaniel Rich as upholders of absolutism. This has, however, been greatly over done. The future careers of both of these men are inconsistent with such an interpretation"—Beer, *The Origins of the British Colonial System*, X, 305. Admitting that the apologists for Sandys have sometimes shown the fond excess natural to apologists, I submit that the issue is not what Rich subsequently became, but what in early life he was. Tennyson has something to say upon a sober man of middle age "whose youth was full of wasteful noise." To my mind that would be putting it very mildly in the case of the second Earl of Warwick of the Rich family.

¹⁸ Speaking of Rich's character, one cannot refrain from quoting this bit of cynical modernism found in the *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic*, 1625-26, No. 121: "Robert Earl of Warwick (to Sec. Con-

He had been led into piracy through that interesting minor episode, the relation between England and Savoy in the year 1616.¹⁹ It was then that Scarnafissi, the Ambassador of Savoy, passed across the stage of English politics, briefly, but with a certain brilliance, issuing commissions to Englishmen who would take the sea under Savoy's warrant to prey upon the commerce of Spain. The episode was perhaps the very end of an era. The spring of 1617, may be held to mark the last upflaring of the Elizabethan temper, with its fanatical hatred of Spain, its unbridled imagination, its antique conception of the sea as a free field for spoliation. Raleigh's wretched last voyage was made possible by this momentary revival of a temper that had passed but was briefly resuscitated by the intrigues of Scarnafissi. In March, 1617, Raleigh sailed. In the same fateful spring the last of all the Elizabethans, young Sir Robert Rich, accepted commissions from Savoy, fitted ships at his own cost, and sent them forth to make spoil upon the ocean.²⁰ As we have seen they were not embarrassed by scruples. The result was deadly enmity between Sir Robert Rich and Sir Thomas Smythe.

Rich, despite the fact that his ships had been caught red-

way) before his brother Montjoy received his commission for his troop of horse, some friends of his had entered into a treaty for his marriage. The Earl has written to the Queen to get him leave to stay and settle the business; wives worth 125 or 130 thousand pounds are not to be had every day."

¹⁹ As to the Duke of Savoy, James was "anxious . . . to do what he could to help him . . . prided himself upon his assumed position of peacemaker in Europe . . . piqued at the long delay of the Spanish government in sending a reply to his pressing overtures on the subject of the marriage."—Gardiner, *History of England*, III, 49.

²⁰ Rich's Savoy commissions are mentioned in various places. For example: "Sir Robert Rich having set forth two ships for the East Indies and procured protection from the Duke of Savoy . . . it is thought fit that both this (East India) Company and the Turkey Company should prefer their petition to the Privy Council that he has sought foreign protection to the dishonour of his Majesty, prejudice of their country, and great damage of both their Companies."—*Calendar of State Papers, East Indies*, 1617-1621, No. 284.

handed in piratical assault upon a friendly power, had the effrontery to claim damages from the East India Company.²¹ His tactics are revealed by the court minutes of the Company under date of February 27, 1618,²² when it was decided to prefer a petition "against Sir Robert Rich endeavoring to disgrace and damnify the Company in causing sailors to be examined, searching into the Company's actions abroad and trying to take all advantage against them."

The quarrel over Rich's ships dragged on with much virulence and varying fortunes all that year and all the next. For the moment it may be dropped. Another cause of hostility between Rich and Smythe now developed. There was something like a runaway match between Smythe's son and the Lady Isabella Rich, Sir Robert's sister.²³ It appears to have incensed Sir Thomas, who like Shylock, knew not which to deplore most, his ducats or his daughter—the lamentation being altered as to sex. The feud was further intensified through a new way discovered by Rich to injure Smythe. In the course of 1618 letters were sent over to Virginia railing against Smythe, Johnson and all their works.²⁴ These letters declared that, "the merchants (as they termed them) who then swayed the courts affected nothing but their own immoderate gain though with the poor planters extreme oppression, as appeared by their magazine." Done into explicit language these letters accuse the Smythe syndicate of abusing their monopoly. Here is the first instance in American history of that issue of the trust and the consumer with which we moderns are so distressingly familiar. The letters to Virginia

²¹ *Ibid.*, Nos. 287, 557, 591, 781, 783.

²² *Ibid.*, 287.

²³ Brown, *Genesis of the United States*, 1014, quotes a letter from Chamberlin to Carlton, describing the escapade to which the Earl of Pembroke gave his countenance, "which is thought a strange thing that so great a man and a councilor should give countenance to such an action as the robbing a man of his only child, a youth of 18 years old." A copyist's error, in the monumental history of Professor Channing, reverses the relationship, making it an affair of "Warwick's son" and "Smythe's daughter."—*History*, I, 194.

²⁴ Kingsbury, *Records*, II, 404.

intimated that if the planters wanted an advocate to go to the King and enlist His Majesty on their behalf, Sir Robert Rich was the man to serve them. That Rich had not caused these letters to be written, is more than most of us can believe. It is known also that letters were sent over from Virginia taking Rich at his word and beseeching the protection of the King against the company.²⁵ However, as will be plain in a moment the object aimed at was not in fact the company but the Smythe syndicate.

²⁵ *Ibid.*; also Brown, *First Republic*, 278, 280.

(To Be Continued.)